(b)(6)

U.S. Department of Homeland Security
U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services
Office of Administrative Appeals
20 Massachusetts Ave., N.W., MS 2090
Washington, DC 20529-2090

U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services

DATE: NOV 2 7 2013 Office: TEXAS SERVICE CENTER FILE:

IN RE: Petitioner:
Beneficiary:

PETITION: Immigrant Petition for Alien Worker as a Member of the Professions Holding an Advanced Degree or an Alien of Exceptional Ability Pursuant to Section 203(b)(2) of the Immigration and Nationality Act, 8 U.S.C. § 1153(b)(2)

ON BEHALF OF PETITIONER:

INSTRUCTIONS:

Enclosed please find the decision of the Administrative Appeals Office (AAO) in your case.

This is a non-precedent decision. The AAO does not announce new constructions of law nor establish agency policy through non-precedent decisions. If you believe the AAO incorrectly applied current law or policy to your case or if you seek to present new facts for consideration, you may file a motion to reconsider or a motion to reopen, respectively. Any motion must be filed on a Notice of Appeal or Motion (Form I-290B) within 33 days of the date of this decision. **Please review the Form I-290B instructions at http://www.uscis.gov/forms for the latest information on fee, filing location, and other requirements.** *See also* 8 C.F.R. § 103.5. **Do not file a motion directly with the AAO.**

Thank you,

Ron Rosenberg
Chief, Administrative Appeals Office

DISCUSSION: The Director, Texas Service Center, denied the immigrant visa petition and the matter is now before the Administrative Appeals Office (AAO) on appeal. The appeal will be dismissed.

The petitioner seeks classification under section 203(b)(2) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (the Act), 8 U.S.C. § 1153(b)(2), as a member of the professions holding an advanced degree. According to Part 6 of the Form I-140, the petitioner seeks employment as a middle school special educator and hearing resource teacher. The petitioner has taught for since 2005. At the time of filing, the petitioner was working for Maryland. The petitioner asserts that an exemption from the requirement of a job offer, and thus of a labor certification, is in the national interest of the United States. The director found that the petitioner qualifies for classification as a member of the professions holding an advanced degree, but that the petitioner has not established that an exemption from the requirement of a job offer would be in the national interest of the United States.

On appeal, the petitioner submits a brief from counsel.

Section 203(b) of the Act states, in pertinent part:

> (2) Aliens Who Are Members of the Professions Holding Advanced Degrees or Aliens of Exceptional Ability. –
>
> > (A) In General. – Visas shall be made available . . . to qualified immigrants who are members of the professions holding advanced degrees or their equivalent or who because of their exceptional ability in the sciences, arts, or business, will substantially benefit prospectively the national economy, cultural or educational interests, or welfare of the United States, and whose services in the sciences, arts, professions, or business are sought by an employer in the United States.
> >
> > (B) Waiver of Job Offer –
> >
> > > (i) . . . the Attorney General may, when the Attorney General deems it to be in the national interest, waive the requirements of subparagraph (A) that an alien's services in the sciences, arts, professions, or business be sought by an employer in the United States.

The record reflects that the petitioner qualifies as a member of the professions with progressive post-baccalaureate experience equivalent to an advanced degree under the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) regulation at 8 C.F.R. § 204.5(k)(3)(i)(B). The sole issue in contention is whether the petitioner has established that a waiver of the job offer requirement, and thus a labor certification, is in the national interest.

Neither the statute nor the pertinent regulations define the term "national interest." Additionally, Congress did not provide a specific definition of "in the national interest." The Committee on the Judiciary merely noted in its report to the Senate that the committee had "focused on national interest by increasing the number and proportion of visas for immigrants who would benefit the United States economically and otherwise. . . ." S. Rep. No. 55, 101st Cong., 1st Sess., 11 (1989).

A supplementary notice regarding the regulations implementing the Immigration Act of 1990, P.L. 101-649, 104 Stat. 4978 (Nov. 29, 1990) (IMMACT90), published at 56 Fed. Reg. 60897, 60900 (Nov. 29, 1991), states, in pertinent part:

> The Service believes it appropriate to leave the application of this test as flexible as possible, although clearly an alien seeking to meet the [national interest] standard must make a showing significantly above that necessary to prove the "prospective national benefit" [required of aliens seeking to qualify as "exceptional."] The burden will rest with the alien to establish that exemption from, or waiver of, the job offer will be in the national interest. Each case is to be judged on its own merits.

In re New York State Dept of Transportation, 22 I&N Dec. 215, 217-18 (Act. Assoc. Comm'r 1998) (*NYSDOT*), has set forth several factors which must be considered when evaluating a request for a national interest waiver. First, a petitioner must establish that the alien seeks employment in an area of substantial intrinsic merit. *Id.* at 217. Next, a petitioner must establish that the proposed benefit will be national in scope. *Id.* Finally, the petitioner seeking the waiver must establish that the alien will serve the national interest to a substantially greater degree than would an available U.S. worker having the same minimum qualifications. *Id.* at 217-18.

While the national interest waiver hinges on prospective national benefit, the petitioner must establish that the alien's past record justifies projections of future benefit to the national interest. *Id.* at 219. The petitioner's subjective assurance that the alien will, in the future, serve the national interest cannot suffice to establish prospective national benefit. The inclusion of the term "prospective" is used here to require future contributions by the alien, rather than to facilitate the entry of an alien with no demonstrable prior achievements, and whose benefit to the national interest would thus be entirely speculative. *Id.*

The petitioner has established that her work as a special educator and hearing resource teacher is in an area of substantial intrinsic merit. It remains, then, to determine whether the proposed benefits of the petitioner's work will be national in scope and whether she will benefit the national interest to a greater extent than an available U.S. worker with the same minimum qualifications.

Eligibility for the waiver must rest with the alien's own qualifications rather than with the position sought. Assertions regarding the overall importance of an alien's area of expertise cannot suffice to establish eligibility for a national interest waiver. *Id.* at 220. Moreover, it cannot suffice to state that the alien possesses useful skills, or a "unique background." Special or unusual knowledge or training does not inherently meet the national interest threshold. The issue of whether similarly-

trained workers are available in the United States is an issue under the jurisdiction of the Department of Labor. *Id.* at 221.

The petitioner filed the Form I-140, Immigrant Petition for Alien Worker, on June 25, 2012. In Part 4 of the Form I-140, the petitioner answered "yes" to whether any petitions had previously been filed on her behalf. The record reflects that filed a Form I-140 petition, with an approved labor certification, on her behalf on July 24, 2009, to classify her as a professional under section 203(b)(3)(A)(ii) of the Act. The Texas Service Center approved the petition on August 4, 2009, with a priority date of October 1, 2008.

In a June 22, 2012 letter accompanying the petition, counsel stated that the petitioner's national interest waiver "is premised on her Equivalent Master's Degree in Special Education, about twenty-four (24) years of dedicated and progressive teaching experience in Special Education, [and] the awards and recognitions received by her." Academic degrees, experience, and recognition for achievements are elements that can contribute toward a finding of exceptional ability. *See* 8 C.F.R. § 204.5(k)(3)(ii)(A), (B), and (F), respectively. Exceptional ability, in turn, is not self-evident grounds for the waiver. *See* section 203(b)(2)(A) of the Act. The USCIS regulation at 8 C.F.R. § 204.5(k)(2) defines "exceptional ability" as "a degree of expertise significantly above that ordinarily encountered" in a given area of endeavor. By statute, aliens of exceptional ability are generally subject to the job offer/labor certification requirement; they are not exempt by virtue of their exceptional ability. Therefore, whether a given alien seeks classification as an alien of exceptional ability, or as a member of the professions holding an advanced degree, that alien cannot qualify for a waiver just by demonstrating a degree of expertise significantly above that ordinarily encountered in her field of expertise. The national interest waiver is an additional benefit, separate from the classification sought, and therefore eligibility for the underlying classification does not demonstrate eligibility for the additional benefit of the waiver.

In his letter accompanying the petition, counsel did not mention the *NYSDOT* guidelines or explain how the petitioner meets them. The record does not show how the petitioner's work will impact the field beyond With regard to the petitioner's teaching duties, there is no evidence establishing that the benefits of her work would extend beyond her middle school students such that they will have a national impact. *NYSDOT* provides examples of employment where the benefits would not be national in scope:

> For instance, pro bono legal services as a whole serve the national interest, but the impact of an individual attorney working pro bono would be so attenuated at the national level as to be negligible. Similarly, while education is in the national interest, the impact of a single schoolteacher in one elementary school would not be in the national interest for purposes of waiving the job offer requirement of section 203(b)(2)(B) of the Act. As another example, while nutrition has obvious intrinsic value, the work of one cook in one restaurant could not be considered sufficiently in the national interest for purposes of this provision of the Act.

Id. at 217, n.3. In the present matter, the petitioner has not shown the benefits of her impact as a middle school teacher beyond the students at her school and, therefore, that her proposed benefits are national in scope. In addition, the record lacks specific examples of how the petitioner's work as a teacher has influenced the special education field on a national level. At issue is whether this petitioner's contributions in the field are of such significance that she merits the special benefit of a national interest waiver, a benefit separate and distinct from the visa classification she seeks. A petitioner must demonstrate a past history of achievement with some degree of influence on the field as a whole. *Id.* at 219, n. 6.

The petitioner submitted various letters of support from administrators, teachers, former students, and a parent discussing her work as a special educator. As some of the letters contain similar claims addressed in other letters, not every letter will be quoted. Instead, only selected examples will be discussed to illustrate the nature of the references' claims.

Dr. Principal, stated:

> I am writing this letter on behalf of [the petitioner] who teaches Hearing Impaired students and special education here at Maryland. When I came to as principal, I met [the petitioner]. Her passion and enthusiasm for students learning is priceless. She has done so much to enrich the knowledge of our scholars. She is dedicated to the scholars that she teaches. We appreciate the work that she strives to do each day for our scholars, our school, and our school community. She is an outstanding educator and a blessing to mankind.

Dr. comments on the petitioner's effectiveness as an educator and her dedication to but he does not indicate how the petitioner's impact or influence as a middle school special education teacher is national in scope. In addition, Dr. fails to provide specific examples of how the petitioner's work has influenced the field as a whole.

Assistant Principal, stated:

> [The petitioner] is one of the special education teachers under my supervision. I have observed her dedication to teaching with one of the most challenged learners in the school, the deaf and hard of hearing class. She comes to all of the staff meetings and department meetings of her concerns [sic]. She attends professional developments and applies what she learned to make her lessons more challenging and interesting. She submits required papers on time. She is a very good advocate of the individual needs of her deaf and hard of hearing class. I saw how she engages her students in her lessons. I have been in the school for more than three months. Within this short period of time, I can say that the commitment and dedication to teach special needs students are all in [the petitioner]. It would take a lot of training, expertise and experience to handle these students and address their needs. [The petitioner] is one of the assets of the Special Education Department of

Ms. comments on the petitioner's activities as a teacher at and her commitment to the school's hearing impaired students, but does not indicate that the petitioner's work has had, or will continue to have, an impact beyond the students in her classroom and the local school system that employed her.

Math Teacher, stated:

> I have known [the petitioner] for numerous years as a fellow staff member at As her special education department chairperson, I have always found [the petitioner] to be the consummate professional both in the classroom and in her other duties as a special educator. She is always prepared to meet the needs of both her students and their families. She also possesses a wonderful working knowledge of . . . her content area, teaching pedagogy, and special education.
>
> On a personal level, [the petitioner] demonstrated all the qualities of a fine and upstanding citizen in terms of her honesty, integrity, and willingness to work with and help others. It is an honor to be acquainted with her both professionally and personally.

Ms. speaks highly of the petitioner's professionalism, preparation, educational knowledge, and personal qualities, but her observations fail to demonstrate that the petitioner's work has influenced the field as whole, or that the petitioner has or will benefit the United States to a greater extent than other similarly qualified middle school special educators.

The petitioner's references praise her teaching abilities and personal character, but they do not demonstrate that the petitioner's work has had an impact or influence outside of the schools where she has taught. They also do not address the *NYSDOT* guidelines which, as published precedent, are binding on all USCIS employees. *See* 8 C.F.R. § 103.3(c). That decision cited school teachers as an example of a profession in a field with overall national importance (education), but in which individual workers generally do not produce benefits that are national in scope. *NYSDOT* at 217, n.3.

The Board of Immigration Appeals (BIA) has held that testimony should not be disregarded simply because it is "self-serving." *See, e.g., Matter of S-A-*, 22 I&N Dec. 1328, 1332 (BIA 2000) (citing cases). The BIA also held, however: "We not only encourage, but require the introduction of corroborative testimonial and documentary evidence, where available." *Id.* If testimonial evidence lacks specificity, detail, or credibility, there is a greater need for the petitioner to submit corroborative evidence. *Matter of Y-B-*, 21 I&N Dec. 1136 (BIA 1998).

The opinions of the petitioner's references are not without weight and have been considered above. USCIS may, in its discretion, use as advisory opinions statements submitted as expert testimony. *See Matter of Caron International*, 19 I&N Dec. 791, 795 (Comm'r 1988). However, USCIS is ultimately responsible for making the final determination regarding an alien's eligibility for the

benefit sought. *Id.* The submission of letters of support from the petitioner's personal contacts is not presumptive evidence of eligibility; USCIS may evaluate the content of those letters as to whether they support the alien's eligibility. *See id.* at 795-796; *see also Matter of V-K-*, 24 I&N Dec. 500, n.2 (BIA 2008) (noting that expert opinion testimony does not purport to be evidence as to "fact").

In addition to the reference letters, the petitioner submitted the following:

1. A for teaching her students "new words in sign language and correcting . . . incorrect signs" (July 27, 2006);
2. A Cohort Certificate of Excellence . . . for outstanding participation and lasting contributions in (April 8, 2008);
3. A Certificate of Appreciation from the for providing "twenty-five hours or more of mentoring support during the 2008-2009 school year";
4. A Certificate of Appreciation from the president of the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) during "PTA Teacher Appreciation Week" "in recognition of outstanding work in opening children's minds to new ideas, serving as an excellent mentor, and helping to create exemplary citizens" (May 19, 2008);
5. A Certificate of Appreciation from the president of the PTA during "PTA Teacher Appreciation Week" "in recognition of outstanding work in opening children's minds to new ideas, serving as an excellent mentor, and helping to create exemplary citizens" (May 9, 2007);
6. An event program from the listing the petitioner among scores of regional honorees within the system;
7. A Teacher Recognition Certificate from the principal of for her participation in American Education Week (November 14-18, 2005);
8. A Certificate of Recognition from the Chief Human Resources Officer for "completion of the Maryland State Department of Education requirements for Standard Professional Certificate and faithful commitment to serve the students of
9. Academic records and transcripts;
10. A "Professional Teacher" identification card from the
11. Maryland Educator Certificates;
12. A "Certification" of good standing from the
13. A "Report of Rating" from the stating that the petitioner "passed the professional board examination for teachers held in ;

14. A "Report of Rating" from the [redacted] stating that the petitioner's "verbal ability" was "average," her "numerical ability" was "below average," and her "analytical ability" was "below average"; and
15. Employment verifications.

Again, academic records, occupational experience, professional certifications, and recognition for achievements are all elements that relate to a finding of exceptional ability, but exceptional ability is not sufficient to establish eligibility for the national interest waiver. The plain language of section 203(b)(2)(A) of the Act indicates that aliens of exceptional ability are subject to the job offer requirement (including alien employment certification). Particularly significant awards may serve as evidence of the petitioner's impact and influence on her field, but the petitioner has failed to demonstrate that the awards she received (items 1 – 8) have more than local, regional, or institutional significance. There is no documentary evidence showing that items 1 – 15 are indicative of the petitioner's influence on the field of education at the national level.

In addition, the petitioner submitted numerous certificates of participation, completion, and attendance for training courses and seminars relating to her professional development. While taking courses and attending seminars are ways to increase one's professional knowledge and to improve as a teacher, there is nothing inherent in these activities to establish eligibility for the national interest waiver.

The director issued a request for evidence on December 4, 2012, instructing the petitioner to submit evidence demonstrating that the benefits of her proposed employment would be national in scope and that she "has a past record of specific prior achievement with some degree of influence on the field as a whole."

In response, the petitioner submitted copies of her "satisfactory" teacher evaluations from [redacted] and her "outstanding" ratings from the [redacted] The petitioner, however, failed to demonstrate how the evaluations and ratings reflect that she has impacted the field to a substantially greater degree than other similary qualified special educators and teachers, and how her specific work has had significant impact outside of the schools where she has taught.

The petitioner also submitted a certification from the [redacted] stating that she interpreted Catholic "mass in sign language every Saturday at the bishops residence from 2001 – 2005" and a Certificate of Appreciation from [redacted] for her "contributions to the ESY [Extended School Year] Summer Program 2011," but there is no documentary evidence demonstrating that the petitioner's work has influenced the field of special education as a whole.

In addition, the petitioner submitted President George H.W. Bush's "Remarks on Signing the Immigration Act of 1990"; information about Public Law 94-142; an article in *Encyclopedia of the Supreme Court of the United States* about *Brown v. Board of Education*, 347 U.S. 483 (1954); a copy of Section 1119 of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLBA); a statement by U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan on the National Assessment of Educational Progress Reading and Math

2011 Results; a September 26, 2011 article in *Education Week* entitled "Shortage of Special Education Teachers Includes Their Teachers"; an article entitled "Supporting Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics Education – Reauthorizing the Elementary and Secondary Education Act"; "Barack Obama on Education" questions and answers posted at www.ontheissues.org; a report entitled "Special Education Teacher Retention and Attrition: A Critical Analysis of the Literature"; an abstract for a report entitled "SPeNSE: Study of Personnel Needs in Special Education"; an article in the *Wall Street Journal* entitled "The Importance of Math & Science in Education"; an article in *Computer Science Technology* entitled "Importance of Science and Math Education"; the written testimony of Microsoft's Bill Gates before the Committee on Science and Technology of the United States House of Representatives (March 12, 2008); information about STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) fields printed from the online encyclopedia *Wikipedia*; and an article entitled "STEM Sell: Are Math and Science Really More Important Than Other Subjects?" As previously discussed, general arguments or information regarding the importance of a given field of endeavor, or the urgency of an issue facing the United States, cannot by themselves establish that an individual benefits the national interest by virtue of engaging in the field. *NYSDOT*, 22 I&N Dec. at 217. Such assertions and information address only the "substantial intrinsic merit" prong of *NYSDOT*'s national interest test. None of the preceding documents demonstrate that the petitioner's specific work as a middle school special educator and hearing resource teacher has influenced the field as a whole.

The director denied the petition on March 20, 2013. The director found that the petitioner failed to establish that an exemption from the requirement of a job offer would be in the national interest of the United States. The director indicated that the petitioner had not shown that the proposed benefits of her work as a special education teacher will be national in scope. The director also determined that the petitioner had failed "to demonstrate any type of impact to the field on a national level."

On appeal, counsel asserts that "USCIS erred in giving insufficient weight to the national educational interests enunciated in the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 [NCLBA] as the guiding principle rather than the precedent case" *NYSDOT*. With regard to following the guidelines set forth in *NYSDOT*, by law, the USCIS does not have the discretion to ignore binding precedent. *See* 8 C.F.R. § 103.3(c).

Counsel argues that Congress passed the NCLBA three years after the issuance of *NYSDOT* as a precedent decision, and claims that "[t]he obscurity in the law that *NYSDOT* sought to address has been clarified," because "Congress has spelled out the national interest with respect to public elementary and secondary school education" through such legislation. In addition, counsel contends that "the NCLB Act and the Obama Education Programs, taken collectively, provide the underlying context for the adjudication of a national interest waiver application made in conjunction with an E21 visa petition for employment as a Highly Qualified Teacher in the public school sector."

Counsel does not support the assertion that the NCLBA modified or superseded *NYSDOT*; that legislation did not amend section 203(b)(2) of the Act. Counsel identifies no specific legislative or regulatory provisions that exempt school teachers from *NYSDOT* or reduce its impact on them. The

unsupported assertions of counsel do not constitute evidence. *See Matter of Obaigbena*, 19 I&N Dec. 533, 534 n.2 (BIA 1988); *Matter of Laureano*, 19 I&N Dec. 1, 3 n.2 (BIA 1983); *Matter of Ramirez-Sanchez*, 17 I&N Dec. 503, 506 (BIA 1980). In contrast, section 5 of the Nursing Relief for Disadvantaged Areas Act of 1999, Pub. L. 106-95 (November 12, 1999), specifically amended the Act by adding section 203(b)(2)(B)(ii) to create special waiver provisions for certain physicians. Congress not only can amend the Act to clarify the waiver provisions, but has in fact done so in direct response to *NYSDOT*. Counsel has not shown that the NCLBA contains a similar legislative change.

Counsel further states:

> With respect to the E21 visa classification, INA § 203(b)(2)(A) provides in relevant part that: "Visas shall be made available . . . to qualified immigrants who are members of the professions holding advanced degrees or their equivalent or who because of their exceptional ability in the sciences, arts, or business, will substantially benefit prospectively the **national . . . educational interests**, . . . of the United States, and whose services in the sciences, arts, professions, or business are sought by an employer in the United States.

Counsel, above, highlights the phrase "national . . . educational interests," but the very same quoted passage also includes the job offer requirement, *i.e.*, the requirement that the alien's "services . . . are sought by an employer in the United States." By the plain language of the statute that counsel quotes on appeal, an alien professional holding an advanced degree is presumptively subject to the job offer requirement, even if that alien "will substantially benefit prospectively the national . . . educational interests . . . of the United States." Again, neither the Act nor the NCLBA create or imply any blanket waiver for highly qualified foreign teachers. As members of the professions, teachers are included in the statutory clause at section 203(b)(2)(A) that includes the job offer requirement.

Counsel asserts that "Congress legislated [NCLBA] to serve as guidance to USCIS in granting legal residence to 'Highly Qualified Teachers.'" Section 9101(23) of the NCLBA defines the term "Highly Qualified Teacher." Briefly, by the statutory definition, a "Highly Qualified" elementary school teacher:

- has obtained full State certification as a teacher or passed the State teacher licensing examination, and holds a license to teach in such State;
- holds at least a bachelor's degree; and
- has demonstrated, by passing a rigorous State test, subject knowledge and teaching skills in reading, writing, mathematics, and other areas of the basic elementary school curriculum, or (in the case of experienced teachers not "new to the profession") demonstrates competence in all the academic subjects in which the teacher teaches based on a high objective uniform State standard of evaluation.

In addition, the petitioner submitted information from the U.S. Department of Labor's *Occupational Outlook Handbook* describing the minimum qualifications necessary to become a special education teacher:

> Public school teachers are required to have a least a bachelor's degree and a state-issued certification or license.
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> Education
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> All states require public special education teachers to have at least a bachelor's degree. Some of these teachers major in elementary education or a content area, such as math or chemistry, and minor in special education. Others get a degree specifically in special education.
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> * * *
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> Some states require special education teachers to earn a master's degree in special education after earning their teaching certification.
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> Licenses
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> All states require teachers in public schools to be licensed. A license is frequently referred to as a certification.
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> * * *
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> Requirements for certification vary by state. However, all states require at least a bachelor's degree. They also require completing a teacher preparation program and supervised experience in teaching, which is typically gained through student teaching. Some states require a minimum grade point average.
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> Many states offer general special education licenses that allow teachers to work with students across a variety of disability categories. Others license different specialties within special education.
>
> Teachers are often required to complete annual professional development classes to keep their license. Most states require teachers to pass a background check. Some states require teachers to complete a master's degree after receiving their certification.

> Some states allow special education teachers to transfer their licenses from another state. However, some states require even an experienced teacher to pass their own licensing requirements.

The petitioner has not established that the "Highly Qualified" standard involves requirements that are significantly more stringent than those outlined in the *Occupational Outlook Handbook*, or that a public school could not obtain a labor certification for a "highly qualified teacher." Thus, the petitioner's level of education and experience are not required for "highly qualified" status under the NCLBA.

Counsel quotes remarks made by then-President George H.W. Bush when he signed the Immigration Act of 1990, which created the national interest waiver: "This bill provides for vital increases for entry on the basis of skills, infusing the ranks of our scientists and engineers and educators with new blood and new ideas." Counsel interprets this passage to mean that Congress created the national interest waiver for "highly qualified" educators. The Immigration Act of 1990, however, was not restricted to the creation of the waiver. It was, rather, an overhaul of the entire immigration structure, creating new employment-based immigrant classifications to replace the "third preference" and "sixth preference" classifications previously in place. "[S]cientists and engineers and educators" are all members of the professions who, under the terms dictated by Congress in the Immigration Act of 1990 (as it amended the Act), are all subject to the job offer requirement.

Counsel asserts that the director "erred in disregarding evidence demonstrating the national scope of the petitioner's proposed benefit through her effective role in serving the national educational interest of closing the achievement gap." The record, however, contains no evidence that the petitioner's efforts have significantly closed that gap in [redacted] or nationally. The national importance of "education" as a concept, or "educators" as a class, does not establish that the work of one teacher produces benefits that are national in scope. *NYSDOT* at 217, n.3. A local-scale contribution to an overall national effort does not meet the *NYSDOT* threshold. The aggregate national effect from thousands of teachers does not give national scope to the work of each individual teacher.

Counsel continues:

> The national priority goal of closing the achievement gaps between minority and nonminority students, and between disadvantaged and more advantaged children is especially relevant in the context of [redacted] and [the petitioner's] assigned school at [redacted] The 2012 MSA Reading results show that out of the 24 Maryland school districts [redacted] ranked near the bottom at the "All Student" level for each MSA-covered grade level . . . .
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> * * *

> Additionally, it is noteworthy that the updated 2012 Maryland Report Card shows that [redacted] did not meet its Reading proficiency AMO targets at the "All Student" level . . . .

The petitioner has worked for [redacted] since 2005, and thus had been there for a number of years before the administration of the 2012 MSA tests. Counsel does not explain how the 2012 MSA results for [redacted] (which indicate low rankings relative to other Maryland school districts) establish that the petitioner has played an effective role in "closing the achievement gap."

Counsel asserts that the petitioner "is an effective teacher in raising student achievement in STEM," but he cited no documentary evidence to support the claim. As previously discussed, the unsupported assertions of counsel do not constitute evidence. *See Matter of Obaigbena*, 19 I&N Dec. at 534 n.2; *Matter of Laureano*, 19 I&N Dec. at 3 n.2; *Matter of Ramirez-Sanchez*, 17 I&N Dec. at 506. In addition, while counsel asserts that the petitioner has "proven success in raising proficiency of her students," he did not point to specific STEM test results or other documentary evidence in the record to support the assertion. Regardless, there is no documentation demonstrating that the petitioner's work has had an impact or influence outside of the schools where she has taught.

Counsel asserts that "the Director has easily dismissed the incomparable accomplishments of [the petitioner]," but there is no documentary evidence showing that the petitioner's accomplishments are "incomparable" as claimed. Again, the unsupported assertions of counsel do not constitute evidence. *See Matter of Obaigbena*, 19 I&N Dec. at 534 n.2; *Matter of Laureano*, 19 I&N Dec. at 3 n.2; *Matter of Ramirez-Sanchez*, 17 I&N Dec. at 506.

Counsel points to the petitioner's awards (items 1 – 8) and speaking engagements as evidence of her "past history of achievement." As previously discussed, the petitioner's awards are institutional, local, or regional in nature, and they do not show that her work has had a wider impact on the field of education. In addition, there is no documentary evidence demonstrating that the petitioner's local speaking engagements had a national impact or were otherwise indicative of her influence on the field as a whole.

Counsel states that factors such as "the 'Privacy Act' protecting private individuals" make it "impossible" to compare the petitioner with other qualified workers and that USCIS "should have presented its own comparable worker." The *NYSDOT* guidelines, however, do not require an item-by-item comparison of the petitioner's credentials with those of qualified United States workers. The key provision is that the petitioner must establish a record of influence on the field as a whole. Moreover, there is no provision in the statute, regulations, or *NYSDOT* requiring the director to specifically identify another equally qualified school teacher. In visa petition proceedings, it is the petitioner's burden to establish eligibility for the immigration benefit sought. Section 291 of the Act, 8 U.S.C. § 1361; *Matter of Otiende*, 26 I&N Dec. 127, 128 (BIA 2013).

Counsel contends that "the Immigration Service is requiring more from the beneficiary's credentials [ ] tantamount to having exceptional ability," but an individual is not required to qualify as an alien of exceptional ability in order to receive the national interest waiver. As previously discussed, the

requirements for exceptional ability are separate from the threshold for the national interest waiver. It remains that the petitioner's evidence does not establish eligibility for the national interest waiver. The director did not require the petitioner to establish exceptional ability in her field. Instead, the director determined that the petitioner had not established that she "will serve the national interest to a substantially greater degree than would an available U.S. worker with the same minimum qualifications."

Counsel states that while the NCLBA "requirements set minimum standards for entry into teaching of core academic subjects, they have not driven strong improvements in . . . the effectiveness of teachers in raising student achievement." However, assertions regarding the need for educational reform in the United States only address the "substantial intrinsic merit" prong of *NYSDOT*'s national interest test. In addition, counsel quotes a study that concluded the "Teach For America" program "rarely had a positive impact on reading achievement." The record, however, does not include a copy of the study. Once again, the unsupported assertions of counsel do not constitute evidence. *See Matter of Obaigbena* at 534 n.2; *Matter of Laureano* at 3 n.2; *Matter of Ramirez-Sanchez* at 506. Regardless, counsel does not show that the petitioner's individual teaching efforts, after several years in the United States, have set her apart from other educators with regard to raising student achievement in or nationally.

Counsel asserts that "59% [of] special educators in the nation [hold an] equivalent Master's degree," and "92% [of] special educators [have] full certification." The study that counsel cited, the "SPeNSE: Study of Personal Needs in Special Education," did not indicate, as counsel claimed, that 59% of United States special education teachers have a master's degree or "equivalent." Rather, as quoted by counsel, the study stated: "Fifty-nine percent of special educators had their Master's degree." While the petitioner in this proceeding took various graduate-level courses, she did not submit evidence that she completed a master's degree. Therefore, the information provided by counsel indicates that the average United States special education teacher possesses higher academic credentials than those of the petitioner.

Counsel cites to studies pointing to high turnover rates and inexperience among special education teachers. Again, the issue of whether similarly-trained workers are available in the U.S. is an issue under the jurisdiction of the Department of Labor. *NYSDOT* at 221. This information shows that there is a demand for credentialed special education teachers, a demand that the labor certification process can – and, in this instance, did – address.

Counsel asserts that the labor certification process poses a "dilemma" for the petitioner because she possesses qualifications "that could not be articulated in conformity with the process regulations." Counsel's assertion, however, is not supported by the evidence in the record. As previously indicated, filed an Application for Permanent Employment Certification, ETA Form 9089, on behalf of the petitioner that was certified by the U.S. Department of Labor with a priority date of October 1, 2008. Regardless, the inapplicability or unavailability of a labor certification cannot be viewed as sufficient cause for a national interest waiver; the petitioner still must demonstrate that she

will serve the national interest to a substantially greater degree than do others in the same field. *NYSDOT* at 218, n.5.

Counsel contends that a waiver would ultimately serve the interests of United States teachers, because if schools "fail to meet the high standard required under the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Law," the result would be "not only . . . closure of these schools but [also] loss of work for those working in those schools." Counsel, however, offers no specific examples of school closures and teacher layoffs attributable to not meeting NCLBA standards. Again, the unsupported assertions of counsel do not constitute evidence. *See Matter of Obaigbena*, 19 I&N Dec. at 534 n.2; *Matter of Laureano*, 19 I&N Dec. at 3 n.2; *Matter of Ramirez-Sanchez*, 17 I&N Dec. at 506. In addition, counsel asserts that by waiving the labor certification requirement for highly qualified special educators such as the petitioner, "more American teachers will have . . . employment opportunities" because standards will be met and schools will not be abolished. However, there are no blanket waivers for highly qualified foreign teachers. As previously discussed, USCIS grants national interest waivers on a case-by-case basis, rather than establishing blanket waivers for entire fields of specialization. *NYSDOT* at 217.

A plain reading of the statute indicates that engaging in a profession (such as teaching) does not presumptively exempt such professionals from the requirement of a job offer based on national interest. The petitioner has not established that her past record of achievement is at a level that would justify a waiver of the job offer requirement which, by law, normally attaches to the visa classification sought by the petitioner. The petitioner need not demonstrate notoriety on the scale of national acclaim, but the national interest waiver contemplates that her influence be national in scope. *Id.* at 217, n.3. More specifically, the petitioner "must clearly present a significant benefit to the field of endeavor." *Id.* at 218. *See also id.* at 219, n.6 (the alien must have "a past history of demonstrable achievement with some degree of influence on the field as a whole"). On the basis of the evidence submitted, the petitioner has not established that a waiver of the requirement of an approved labor certification will be in the national interest of the United States.

In visa petition proceedings, it is the petitioner's burden to establish eligibility for the immigration benefit sought. Section 291 of the Act, 8 U.S.C. § 1361; *Matter of Otiende* at 128. Here, that burden has not been met.

ORDER: The appeal is dismissed.